

## Letter and enclosure from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, March 25, 1901

DICTATED. Volta Bureau, March 25, 1901. Dear Mabel: —

Have been wondering where you are and when I should hear from you. Received this morning a cablegram which was telephoned from Charlie's office, appearing as follows: —

“(Telephoned by Mr. Chas. Bell, at 11 A. M., March 25).

CABLEGRAM FROM FRANCE Bell, Washington.

ALGENSIS SALFUS ALL TURNER Mabel”

Algensis seemed to be clear “arrived here all well”, but what about salfus and Turner. Charlie could not help me, for he had mailed the original cablegram. Miss Safford, therefore went down to the cable office, taking the unicode with her to see copy of original, which was signed Turner, not Mabel, and it came from Naples, not France. Miss Safford probably mistook Naples for Mabel. Salfus turns out to be falsus, so that the message revised reads as follows:

“March 25, 1901, Naples Bell, Washington, Algensis (arrived here all well) falsus (telegraph health of) all. Turner.”

This is all clear but who is Turner? There are more Bells than one in Washington, can it be intended for someone else? It occurred to me that perhaps Turner was the name of your banker in 2 Naples, so I telephoned Charlie to find out whether there was any banker of that name in Naples, and he found there was “Turner & Co.” So on chance I have sent you a cablegram to his care

## Library of Congress

"Washington, Mch. 25, 1901 Graham Bell, Care Turner, Naples. Alabaster all well Alec."

Hope you will receive it safely.

I enclose letter from Sir William Crookes, dated March 12, He enclosed printed proof (which I retain here) of a lecture delivered before the Royal Institution Feb. 8, 1901, by Prof. G. H. Bryan, F.R.S., on the subject of HISTORY AND PROGRESS OF AERIAL LOCOMOTION. It therefore seemed to me inadvisable that I should give a lecture upon the same subject in the same course.

Having convinced Bert that for many reasons it was advisable to postpone my lecture until next year (thus giving me time to prepare a lecture worthy of the occasion) I gave him last night the following cablegram to be sent this morning: —

"Washington D. C., March 25, 1901.

Crookes, Royal Institution, London.

Prefer postpone lecture until next year as subject already treated by Bryan. Reply.

Graham Bell".

3

To this I have received the following reply:

"London, March 25 Graham Bell Washington. Regret. Agree. Crookes."

(I send copy of Sir William Crookes' letter instead of original).

So this lecture is off for the present, and I am glad of it, for consideration assured me that by giving such a lecture at the present time I would run a great chance of MAKING A FOOL OF MYSELF on account of my ignorance of what others had done in relation

## Library of Congress

to aerial locomotion. I have been studying up the subject for some time past and I am overwhelmed — nay STAGGERED at the vast amount of chaotic material that exists. The little examination that I have been able to make of the subject makes me doubt whether I really have any new thought to communicate. It would be most mortifying for me to announce discoveries or ideas upon the subject and then find out afterwards that everything I had suggested was as old as the hills — er at least older than I am. What a confession of ignorance that would be.

Just fancy my position: — With the reputation the telephone has given to me I would appear before the Royal Institution as one believed by Sir William Crookes, and Prof. Dewar to be an authority upon the subject — for why otherwise should I be invited — and then, after the lecture has been given and the ideas fully elaborated and set before the world — to find that they had all been previously discovered and PUBLISHED by others, and that I had given them forth as my own without even mentioning the names of those who first originated them !!

Now I breathe freely and can go to work in what seems to me the proper way.

My experiments in Cape Breton have made me thoroughly familiar with the subject matter itself. Now let me familiarize myself with what others have done. My knowledge of the subject matter will enable me to read understandingly and to appreciate the points that have been made by my predecessors. Before I announce any discoveries I must be sure that I have something original to communicate.

The subject of my lecture should relate, I think, to WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE — leaving myself and my experiments severely alone. Take a bird's eye view of the whole situation. Give credit to whom credit is due, trace the lines of progress manifest in the past, and project them into the future. Don't seek to bring forward anything of my own, but simply seek to give the results of my study of the researches of others.

## Library of Congress

Then let me publish a book in which should be reprinted — as the argument — the lecture before the Royal Institution containing in the form of an appendix “Historical Notes relating to Aerial Transit” containing a description of the various inventions in the form of ACTUAL ILLUSTRATIONS, which everyone can read — whatever may be their language. Nicely printed illustrations — a collection of all I can find — and I know several hundreds of them.

Such a book would be, I think of fascinating interest to the 5 general public, as well as indispensable to inventors and scientific investigators. With very little printed matter to accompany the illustrations, and that matter chiefly in the form of REFERENCES where to find the original descriptions. To attempt to describe all or even to give the claims from patent specifications would make a large volumes, and the descriptions after all could only be read by those having a knowledge of the English language.

A volume, however, speaking largely in the universal language of pictures would have — or might have — a WORLD SALE. The lecture itself forming the argument might be translated into French, German, &c. for foreign editions of the work. Publishers could easily be found who would gladly undertake the whole thing. And I believe that such a work would have an enormous circulation. It would give a stimulus to the subject of aerial transit all over the world.

In my remarks let me confine myself to general principles and not to specific recommendations.

(Interrupted)

The whole object of the book to be to give a coup d'oeil of the whole subject up to the date of the volume without anything of A.G.B.'S in it with the exception of general remarks upon the subject — the pointing out of oines of progress, &c., &c. No account of my experiments, no description of any specific form of flying machine to be credited to me.

## Library of Congress

Now, I feel pretty sure that the publication of such a book as that would cause the world to listen to anything that I might say AFTERWARDS.

After a reasonable time let me follow this up by scientific papers giving the results of the experiments made in Cape Breton, and then follow these up with other original contributions giving descriptions of specific forms of apparatus suitable for a practical flying machine — that is if I arrive at anything worth publication.

I want that lecture before the Royal Institution — or should the lecture never be given — I want the book to make an immediate impression upon the world as a worthy contribution to a great subject.

In looking back over the history of the subject I recognise two events, and only two, that have profoundly modified the world's progress in respect to aerial transit.

The first was in 1783, when the brothers Montgolfier made their first public exhibition of a fire balloon. The second occurred in 1863, when Nadar, in his “Manifesto”, announced the principle of “HEAVIER THAN THE AIR”.

I want to make my lecture or book another mile stone on the path of progress:—By adding on to Nadar's principle “heavier than the air” another principle of far reaching consequence THE HEAVIER THE BETTER. Great specific weight as an advantage, not a hindrance — momentum as the supporting power — not the air . If I can demonstrate the truth of the great central principle that now lies clearly defined in my mind — the world will be startled with a vision of IRON CLADS in the air, not butterflies or balloons; and aeroplanes, aerocurves, balloons and all the various instrumentalities that are now so prominent in the public mind will be relegated to the background of the 19th century — ( the middle ages as it were ) —and the 20th century's efforts will be devoted to the propulsion — at great velocities — of machines of great specific weight. The resistance of the air will be considered as an obstacle to their flight and not an assistance, excepting that the

## Library of Congress

resistance will be utilized for gaining great propulsive power and for steering purposes. Men will no longer look upon the air as the SOURCE OF SUPPORT but will rely mainly upon momentum.

The proposition that I should address the Royal Institution upon this subject has started me upon the right track. My thoughts have acquired momentum, so that it matters not whether I ever give that lecture or not. I will go right ahead with THE STUDY OF WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE. I will publish the results of this study — whether before the Royal Institution or elsewhere is a matter of little consequence — I will incorporate the results in a book and publish it: And then — and not till then — will I give public utterance to the cranky thought contained in this letter. Nor will I publish it at all until I have thoroughly satisfied myself by EXPERIMENT as well as theory of the correctness of the basal thought contained: Mass — weight — an advantage; — momentum the source of support — in a word “ INERTIA-FLIGHT ” the solution of the whole problem.

Your loving husband Alec

A. G. Bell c/o & Co 6 rue

COPY. 7 Kensington Park Gardens, London, W., March 12, 1901. My dear Prof. Graham Bell,

Your letter of the 20th Feb. is to hand, and I have consulted Professor Dewar and others about the title of your lecture. We all think the first title you propose — “The Conquest of the Air”: — An Unsolved Problem from the Nineteenth Century” — the best, and we therefore will have it announced under that title. The subject is one which is sure to attract a good audience, and I am greatly indebted to you for having so cordially accepted my invitation that you should come and deliver a lecture before the Members of the R. I.

## Library of Congress

We had a lecture on a somewhat similar subject at the beginning of the session, by Professor Bryan, so in case you might be repeating anything that was brought before us on that occasion I enclose a proof of the abstract which has just come from the printer.

Bryan scarcely touched on Langley's work, and confined himself chiefly to gliding flight. A description of Langley's latest experiments, and those of others who are working in the same direction in America, would be of the highest interest.

Will you kindly let me know when you will be in England, and about how long you propose remaining. I want to ask a few friends to meet Mrs. Graham Bell and yourself here, about the time of the lecture.

With kind regards to Mrs. Graham Bell, in which Lady Crookes joins, believe me, very sincerely yours (signed) William Crookes.